How Government Works

Australia's formal name is the Commonwealth of Australia. Australia is both a representative democracy and a constitutional monarchy with Queen Elizabeth II as Australia's head of state.

**Federation**

The Commonwealth of Australia was formed on 1 January 1901 when six partly self-governing British colonies united to become states of a nation. The rules of government for this new nation were enshrined in the Australian Constitution, which defined how the Commonwealth government was to operate and what issues it could pass laws on. The birth of our nation is often referred to as 'federation' because the Constitution created a 'federal' system of government. Under a federal system, powers are divided between a central government and individual states. In Australia, power was divided between the Commonwealth federal government and the six state governments.

**Australian government**

The Australian Parliament consists of the Queen (represented by the Governor-General), the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Parliament passes laws which affect the whole country. Section 51 of the Constitution defines a number of issues that the Parliament can make laws on. There are three arms of government in Australia:

- the legislature (or Parliament) is responsible for debating and voting on new laws to be introduced under the power of section 51.
- the executive (the Australian Government) is responsible for enacting and upholding the laws established by the legislature. Certain members of the legislature (called ministers) are also members of the executive, with special responsibilities for certain areas of the law.
- the judiciary is the legal arm of the federal government. It is independent of the other two arms, and is responsible for enforcing the laws and deciding whether the other two arms are acting within their powers.

Reference